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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# Intelligence Memorandum

*Dinesh Singh and US-India Relations*

State Dept. review completed

**Secret**

10 April 1970  
No. 0500/70

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
10 April 1970

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Dinesh Singh and US-India Relations

Introduction

Over a year ago, Prime Minister Gandhi selected one of her closest confidants, Dinesh Singh, as her minister of external affairs. A leftist with no political base of his own, he has risen to the top on the strength of his association with Mrs. Gandhi. His appointment was initially interpreted in the US as bad news for American relations with India.

This memorandum assesses Singh's role in several episodes in Indian foreign relations during the past year. The probability is that there will be additional rough spots ahead for US-India relations, resulting at least as much from Singh's style in conducting affairs as from his leftist bent.

Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence, and coordinated with the Office of National Estimates and the Clandestine Service.

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Dinesh Singh's Career

1. On 18 March this year, External Affairs Minister Dinesh Singh told the lower house of India's parliament, "We must pay the highest tribute to the people of Vietnam for the struggle they have waged now over two decades for their independence." His speech--possibly the most favorable to Hanoi ever made by an Indian official--is only one indication of the leftward drift in Indian foreign policy since Prime Minister Gandhi chose him as her foreign minister over a year ago.

2. With no independent political base, Dinesh Singh has risen to power largely because of his association with Mrs. Gandhi. Both his father and grandfather were closely allied with her father--Jawaharlal Nehru--in the struggle for independence, and Dinesh began his career in 1947 as one of Nehru's assistant secretaries. Since then, his rise has been rapid, at least by Indian standards.

3. He was elected to parliament in 1956 and became a deputy minister--the lowest of the three tiers in the Indian Council of Ministers--in 1962. Mrs. Gandhi promoted him to minister of state when she became prime minister in 1966 and also directed him to perform additional functions "as assigned to him by the prime minister." A year later she gave him the Commerce portfolio; at the age of 41, Dinesh became the second youngest of the 13 major ministers. In 1969, the prime minister appointed him to the more important post of minister of external affairs.

4. Dinesh appears to have been the primary advocate in the Indian Government of upgrading representation with North Vietnam--India has long had consulates in both Hanoi and Saigon--and of stronger informal relations with the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) of South Vietnam. He also has championed the closing of US information centers in India. Dinesh's role is less

-2-

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clear in a variety of other potential or actual irritants in US-India relations, but since he took office, the External Affairs Ministry has at best been unsympathetic when US interests appeared endangered by Indian pressures on foreign oil companies, plans to nationalize foreign insurance companies, and measures to discourage Indian travel on foreign airlines.

5. Two recent episodes--the attempt to grant formal recognition to Hanoi, and the closing of several USIA offices in India--illustrate both Dinesh Singh's methods and the degree to which he is able to determine foreign policy.

#### Recognition of Hanoi

6. Dinesh argues that Asia must be left to the Asians but, at the same time, he sees a danger to India from Chinese dominance in Southeast Asia. Working from the assumption that the Vietnamese Communists will be the eventual victors in the current struggle, he believes that India can counter Peking only by increasing its influence in Hanoi.

7. Late in the summer of 1969, India was under no unusual pressure from either local Communists or the Communist nations for a new initiative toward North Vietnam. But increased contacts with Hanoi--due in part to Dinesh's attendance at Ho's funeral--and some North Vietnamese pressure for recognition of the PRG gave Dinesh a reason to review India's policy regarding Southeast Asia. Mrs. Gandhi was preoccupied with domestic politics, and Morarji Desai--the leading conservative in the cabinet--had resigned in July, so that Dinesh probably believed he had greater freedom of action.

7. By September, he was telling a number of people--including newsmen, off-the-record--that India had decided to raise its consulate-general in Hanoi to an embassy. By November, however, after New Delhi became fully aware that adverse reaction from Washington would probably be strong, official recognition had been indefinitely postponed.

-3-

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8. Dinesh's original decision to upgrade relations with Hanoi was probably not designed to damage US interests or to help the Communists. Nevertheless, in judging which policy best served Indian interests, his frame of reference was such that he either badly underestimated the probable US reaction, or--more likely--did not give great weight to the value of good relations with the US.

9. Dinesh clearly led the effort to make an upgrading of relations with Hanoi the official government policy, and his calculated leaks to the press and others may well have been designed to force Mrs. Gandhi's hand. Nevertheless, he had good reason to believe that his policy had at least the tacit support of the Indian Government. Most senior officials in the External Affairs Ministry--including some of his rivals--supported his policy. Opposition politicians and the press were aware of what he hoped to do. Mrs. Gandhi--despite her preoccupation with domestic politics--could hardly have been ignorant of Dinesh's plans. Apparently, she was willing to give him a considerable amount of freedom in formulating Indian foreign policy and may have stepped in eventually only because of US representations.

10. Mrs. Gandhi herself has taken pro-Hanoi positions in the past, although she has never gone as far as did Dinesh in his 18 March speech to parliament. Probably her most strongly worded statement came in a joint communiqué from Moscow in 1966, which spoke of "the aggressive actions of imperialist and other reactionary forces" in the world and blamed the "dangerous situation" in Southeast Asia on US bombing.

#### Closing the Cultural Centers

11. In December 1969, nine workmen were killed when a wall collapsed during the construction of a Soviet cultural center at Trivandrum in Kerala State. The incident quickly became a political issue. The

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Soviets not only lacked permission to establish a center in Trivandrum, but were acting in violation of a 1954 ban on such centers in cities where the foreign power had neither a consulate nor a trade mission. Under pressure from the political right, the government ordered construction stopped.

12. Communist diplomats and left-wing politicians then began demanding that similar Western cultural and information centers also be closed. Prior to the 1954 ban, the US had established six centers in nonconsular cities, and five of these were still functioning--with Indian permission--at the time of the Trivandrum incident. The UK, West Germany, and France also had cultural centers in nonconsular cities, though these were less closely tied to their respective governments than were the USIA installations.

13. On 10 February, India circulated a note to foreign missions asking them within 30 days to furnish details on their cultural centers. On 20 February, an Indian official told US diplomats that the request was designed merely to help India investigate the question, and that although no final decision on the fate of the centers had been made, it might go against the US. The next day, the same official reported that she had spoken to Dinesh Singh about the concern of the US and that he had promised to look into the matter.

14. On 24 February, however, the Americans learned that in a note dated 18 February--which was not sent to the US Embassy--the Indians had ordered the closing of foreign cultural centers in nonconsular cities by 18 May. Subsequently, Dinesh Singh announced that the fate of the French, British, and German centers was still under study.

15. On 26 February, during a stormy session of the lower house of parliament, Dinesh denied that India was discriminating against the US. He maintained that India was merely ending a practice that

-5-

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had discriminated in favor of the Americans. On the same day, his deputy charged in the upper house that foreign centers were being closed because of their "political and other undesirable activities." The implication was clear--with only US centers being closed--although other Indian officials have since privately denied that they had any intention of accusing the US centers of engaging in "undesirable activities."

16. The Indians probably chose what appeared to be the easiest solution to a problem that they had no desire to face. The government could not allow the USSR to continue construction without giving support to right-wing charges that Mrs. Gandhi is under Soviet influence. Domestically, however, Mrs. Gandhi's minority government depends on leftist support--including the pro-Soviet Communist Party of India--and so had to appear responsive to left-wing demands. In such a situation, the best solution was one that alienated the least support at home, could be justified as removing rather than imposing discrimination, and showed the government uniformly enforcing established policy. The resulting decision may not have been consciously anti-US--the Americans may simply have had the misfortune to be standing in the way.

17. Dinesh, once again, was probably out in front of the rest of the Indian Government. On 10 February, the Indians apparently intended to wait until at least 10 March before announcing a decision, but by 18 February had changed their minds. During this time, Mrs. Gandhi was negotiating the formation of two state governments and rewriting a bank nationalization law that the Supreme Court had just overruled. Nevertheless, here again, she must have had some knowledge of so widely a debated issue.

18. Dinesh probably had enough authority to move up the date of the formal decision on his own. Why he did so is unclear. Either he or Mrs. Gandhi

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may have hoped to end the problem before parliament opened on 20 February. It is also possible, however, that Dinesh rushed matters to make sure that the prime minister did not back away from what he regarded as the "correct" solution. There are some indications, in fact, that she is now trying to do precisely that.

### Conclusion

19. In both cases, Dinesh seems to have decided on policies that--at least from his leftist point of view--seemed best for India. He tried to force the implementation of those policies by moving ahead of Mrs. Gandhi, and--when he was given the opportunity--pre-empting her.

20. Mrs. Gandhi [REDACTED] has been growing increasingly displeased with Dinesh since late last year. Her failure to appoint him to any high position in the Congress Party may be one indication of her disaffection. But his lack of an independent power base and his unpopularity with some party leaders are probably more important reasons for her neglect. [REDACTED]

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On 13 March, the New Delhi Statesman reported that relations between the two were so bad that Dinesh had submitted his resignation, which Mrs. Gandhi refused to accept. According to the newspaper, matters came to a head over appointments in the government, but the prime minister also believed that Dinesh Singh should have discussed the cultural centers issue with her more fully before issuing any orders.

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21. Mrs. Gandhi probably objects more to Dinesh's methods than to his solutions. In both the Hanoi and the information centers affairs, he annoyed the US when more skillful handling might

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have achieved the same end with less strain on India-US relations. It might be argued that Dinesh's slights to the US--such as his failure to send the cultural center closure note to the US Embassy and the accusation by his deputy that the US information centers were engaging in undesirable activities--are deliberately calculated affronts. Dinesh, however, is capable of blunders that help neither himself nor India. For example, by including a non-Moslem in the delegation to the Islamic Summit at Rabat, Dinesh annoyed India's Arab friends and pleased only Pakistan.

22. Even if Mrs. Gandhi is dissatisfied with Dinesh's performance, she will find it difficult to dismiss a man who has been so closely identified with her and for whom she may still hold personal regard. Moreover, her enemies could claim either that his dismissal was a repudiation of her own policies or that, in her efforts on his behalf for a number of years, she had exercised poor judgment.